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Francisco Suárez on Beings of Reason and Non-Strict Ontological Pluralism

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Are there beings of reason? This question appears in the title of the first section of the fifty-fourth of Francisco Suárez's *Metaphysical Disputations* (DM). At this point in the *Metaphysical Disputations*, all we know is that beings of reason are not real (DM 1.1.4–6, XXV, 3a–4a; 54, prol.1, XXVI, 1015a). So the first question of DM 54.1 is this: are there beings that are not real? At first glance this question seems absurd. If something is a being, how could it fail to be real? The first position reported by Suárez takes just this line. According to this negative position, a being of reason is made up [*fictum*], just as Pegasus is made up. But clearly such things do not have being: “it is a contradiction to say that there is such a being, since what is only made up [*fingitur*] does not have being [*non est*]” (DM 54.1.2, XXVI, 1015b).¹

But there are also reasons to say that there are things that are not real, things that are only made up. The primary argument in support of what I will call the positive position (‘realist’ will not do, since beings of reason are by definition not real) is that “the properties of being apply to beings of reason, for a being of reason is one or many, and it is intelligible, etc.” (DM 54.1.3, XXVI, 1016a).² This one-line argument can be read in several ways. It can be read as affirming that beings of

All references are to the Vivès edition of Suárez's *Opera omnia*. The *Metaphysical Disputations* are cited by disputation, section, and paragraph number, followed by the volume and page numbers of the Vivès edition. I have compared all quotations against the 1597 Salamanca edition and noted one discrepancy in the notes. All translations from Latin are my own, but I have consulted John Doyle's (1995) generally reliable translation of DM 54.

1. The negative position seems to have been a minority position. Suárez attributes it to one Antonio Bernardi della Mirandola (1503–1565), and he says that Francisco Mayrone (d. ca. 1328) defends the negative position for the sake of argument. As far as I can tell, Mirandola does not discuss beings of reason in his commentary on the *Categories* (*Institutio in universam logicam* [Rome, 1562]). For a critical edition of the relevant Mayrone text, see Nora Cuhrová and Lukáš Novák, eds. (2006). Later Jesuits attribute the negative position to one Vallesius, *loco non invento*.
2. Suárez does not cite anyone in favor of this position. In his translation, Doyle suggests that Suárez has in mind Thomists such as Capreolus, Ferrara, and Soncinas (Doyle 1995: 60, fn. 14). However, it is not clear from their discussions of beings of reason that these authors endorsed the positive view as Suárez states it.

reason have properties such as being one and being intelligible; but something must *be* to have properties; so, there are beings of reason. Call this the *characteristic argument for non-existents*. Alternatively, the argument could be read as affirming that there are truths about beings of reason. For instance, it is true that a goat-stag is not a man-lion (so they are many instead of one). But propositions are true only if something makes them true, and the only things capable of making it true that a goat-stag is not a man-lion are the goat-stag and the man-lion. Hence, there are such things as goat-stags and man-lions. Call this the *alethic argument for non-existents*. Finally, the one-line argument can be read as affirming that we can think about beings of reason — they are intelligible — but one can't think about something unless it is there to be thought about. Hence, there are beings of reason. Call this the *intentionality argument for non-existents*. The positive position alleges that there are beings of reason in the same sense in which there are cats and hats. Such items are needed as bearers of properties, as truthmakers, and as intentional objects.

Suárez ends up endorsing a view that makes good on the insights of both the negative position and the positive position. He agrees that there is a sense in which 'there are beings of reason' is contradictory and therefore false. But he also recognizes the power of the various arguments for non-existent objects, especially the intentionality argument, and he develops a position according to which we can think about non-existent objects. Suárez's view of non-existents has received some scholarly attention, but it has been either misrepresented or not fully understood, in ways that will become clear as we proceed. My aim in this paper is to establish what I take to be the definitive features of Suárez's view of nonexistent objects and demonstrate their philosophical import. My main contention is twofold. First, Suárez thinks that beings of reason do not exist, but they have being nonetheless. Suárez is therefore an ontological pluralist in that he recognizes more than one way of being (§2). The main objection to ontological pluralism in the contemporary literature is that, at best, it is a matter of mere bookkeeping rather than ontology and, at worst, it is nonsense.

My second main contention is that Suárez provides an interesting and cogent response to this objection when arguing against ontological monism (§3). Suárez's response to this objection forces us to distinguish between two kinds of ontological pluralism: strict and non-strict. In the end it will become clear that Suárez's pluralism is non-strict. Suárez's pluralism presents a dialectical option not currently on the menu of contemporary meta-metaphysics.

1. Suárez's Remarks: An Exegetical Puzzle

My intention in this section is not to establish the ontological pluralist reading but to present Suárez's position in his own words. This will set up and explain the exegetical puzzle that motivates much of the current scholarship on Suárez's position on beings of reason, a puzzle that the ontological pluralist interpretation can solve, as explained in the following section.

Suárez initially seems to affirm the positive position. The "true opinion," he tells us, is that "there are [*dari*]" some beings of reason" (DM 54.1.4, XXVI, 1016a). It is at this point that Suárez provides his formal definition of a being of reason as "what has being only objectively in the intellect" (DM 54.1.6, XXVI, 1016b).⁴ I return below to this

3. I have encountered a surprising amount of resistance to my choice of translating *dari* as 'there are'. I have two reasons for translating *dari* as 'there are': first, the claim that there are [*dari*] beings of reason is supposed to be an answer to the question whether there is [*an sit*] such a thing as a being of reason. Second, Suárez often uses *dari* and *esse* interchangeably. For example: "Therefore, unless he does not know what he is saying, no one can deny that there is [*dari*] such a thing, made up by cognition alone, unless perhaps he is equivocating in his use of the verb *dari* or *esse*" (DM 54.1.7, XXVI 1017a). This claim makes sense only if we assume that *esse* and *dari* are equivalent, for why else would an equivocation on *esse* be relevant to the claim that there are [*dari*] not beings of reason? Further, Suárez often makes ontological claims using both *esse* and *dari*. For example, in his argument for the existence of God, he uses both *esse* and *dari* to express the claim that God exists (DM 29). To those who remain unconvinced, I say bear with me. What matters is the exegetical puzzle generated below, and that puzzle can be generated without reliance on the use of *dari*, since Suárez also says or implies *passim* that beings of reason have being (*esse*).
4. The definition of a being of reason was the subject of some debate since the

notion of “being objectively in the intellect.” For now it is sufficient to note that for Suárez, beings of reason appear to have some sort of being. So Suárez’s view is that there are nonexistent objects of thought.

Suárez thinks we must posit beings of reason precisely because we can think about them and say true things about them. Suárez also makes the point, now familiar from Quine (1948), that denying beings of reason lands one in paradox: “We could not even debate about beings of reason without thinking of them. [...] Therefore, unless he does not know what he is saying, no one can deny that there is such a thing, made up by cognition alone” (DM 54.1.7, XXVI, 1017a).

Suárez faces the charge of contradiction raised by advocates of the negative position. How can there *be* nonexistent objects? Suárez’s characterization of the ontological status of beings of reason exacerbates this problem. Immediately after stating his view, Suárez tells us that beings of reason do not “have any true similarity with real beings by reason of which they share a common concept of being with real beings” (DM 54.1.4, XXVI, 1016a). Thus, beings of reason are unlike real beings insofar as beings of reason do not have being! Suárez makes similar remarks elsewhere:

To be only objectively in reason is not to be [*non est esse*] but to be cognized or made up. Thus the common description that can be given of the common concept of being – namely, that which has being – really does not apply to beings of reason [...] a being of reason is such that being cannot apply to it [*ens autem rationis tale est ut ei repugnat esse*]. [DM 54.1.10, XXVI, 1018a]

medieval period. For a detailed and critical review of the major views, see Fonseca, *In libros metaphysicarum*, vol. 2 (Rome: 1589) lib. 5, ch. 7, q. 6, pp. 402ff. Suárez also provides a secondary definition: a being of reason is “that which is cognized by reason as a being but has no being in itself” (DM 54.1.4, XXVI, 1016a). Suárez seems to take this definition to be equivalent to the first, but it is not clear that the two definitions are equivalent, as noted in Novotny (2013: 103).

For strictly speaking this proposition, ‘A chimera is not a being [*est non ens*]’, is true. Because if it is a fictitious being, it is therefore not a being. [DM 54.5.16, XXVI, 1035b]

Here Suárez clearly states that beings of reason do not have being and are not beings, thereby apparently endorsing the sort of contradiction imputed to the positive position by advocates of the negative position. For he endorses both (1) and (2):

(1) There are beings of reason.

(2) Beings of reason have no being.

We are therefore faced with an exegetical puzzle. What exactly is Suárez’s view of the ontological status of nonexistent objects? Are they beings or not? If so, what are we to make of Suárez’s insistence that they are not? If not, what are we to make of his insistence that there are such things?

2. The Ontological Pluralist Interpretation

Suárez himself provides the resources to resolve the apparent contradiction between (1) and (2). In support of his view, Suárez cites with approval Aristotle’s distinction between two kinds of being [*duplex esse*]: “one which is truly in reality, and the other, which is not always in reality, but only in the apprehension of the mind” (DM 54.1.4, XXVI, 1016a).⁵ The first kind of being Suárez calls ‘real being’, and the latter he calls ‘objective being’ (DM 54.2.3, XXVI, 1019a). As we know from above, beings of reason are not real, so they lack real being. But Suárez insists throughout DM 54 that beings of reason have objective being or, equivalently, they have being objectively. To take an especially clear

5. See also the *Index locupletissimus*, (4.2.2, XXV, xva): “We speak in two ways about being: in one way, as ‘being’ comprehends only true real beings. [...] In another way, as it extends to many things that truly and intrinsically are not beings, but are called beings only through a certain extrinsic attribution. Such are privations, and all beings *per accidens* or beings of reason.”

example, Suárez states, “Although a being of reason does not have real being, it does have objective being” (DM 54.2.3, XXVI, 1019a).

Suárez explicitly states that ‘being’ is predicated analogously of real beings and beings of reason and that we do not have a concept of being that applies to both (more on this claim below; DM 54.1.9–10, XXVI, 1017b–1018a). That is, ‘being’ has two different senses, and one sense applies to beings of reason, while another sense applies to real beings. So one way to resolve the apparent contradiction between (1) and (2) is to read them as expressing two different senses of ‘being’:

(1a) Beings of reason have objective being.

(2a) Beings of reason do not have real being.

This reading dissolves the apparent contradiction between (1) and (2).

Suárez himself disambiguates ontological claims in exactly the way I am suggesting. He writes:

When we say that there are [*dari aut esse*] beings of reason, we do not mean that they are in reality according to true existence, otherwise we would be involved in a contradiction. [...] Such beings are therefore said to be not *simpliciter* but in a respect, according to their capacity — namely, only objectively in the intellect. And so the matter is clear. [DM 54.1.7, XXVI, 1017a]

At this point Suárez has asserted:

(1) There are beings of reason,

but Suárez is aware of the fact that (1) is ambiguous between at least two readings:

(1a) Beings of reason have objective being,

(1b) Beings of reason exist.

Suárez notes that (1b) is self-contradictory when he clarifies: “we do not mean that they are in reality according to true existence, otherwise

we would be involved in a contradiction” (DM 54.1.7, XXVI, 1017a). Here he is assuming that a being of reason is by definition something that does not exist; hence, it would be contradictory to say that beings of reason, which do not exist, exist. Yet Suárez has also stated that (1) there are [*dari aut esse*] beings of reason. In the above passage, he explains that when he makes claims such as (1), we are to interpret him as meaning (1a). In exactly the same way and for exactly the same reasons, when Suárez makes claims such as (2), we are to interpret him as meaning (2a).

So on my reading, Suárez is an ontological pluralist insofar as he thinks there is more than one way of being.⁶ The ontological pluralist interpretation gives us everything we want in an interpretation of Suárez’s view of the ontological status of beings of reason. It comports fairly straightforwardly with the texts, and it accommodates the arguments for the positive position. For Suárez, there can be truths about beings of reason, thoughts about beings of reason, and properties of beings of reason, all because there is a sense in which there are beings of reason. Beings of reason do not exist, but they do have objective being.

In a recent entry into the literature on Suárez’s view of beings of reason, Christopher Shields (2012) argues that Suárez is an ontological monist, and beings of reason have no being whatsoever. When Suárez says that beings of reason have objective being, Shields interprets this as meaning simply that we can think about beings of reason, but it does not follow that beings of reason are *there* to be thought about. As I explain below, I think there is some truth to Shields’s interpretation, but I also think it is misleading insofar as it denies that Suárez is an ontological pluralist. I do not have the space to argue at length against Shields’s monist interpretation, but I take it that there is enough going for the ontological pluralist interpretation to warrant working out its details, to which I now turn.

6. A version of this interpretation is endorsed by Canteñs (2003) and Novotny (2013, 2015), and it is hinted at in Doyle (1987, 1988).

3. The Idle Hypothesis Objection

The ontological pluralist interpretation solves the exegetical puzzle introduced in Section 1, but it raises a new, philosophical problem about ontological pluralism itself. Some philosophers, like Peter van Inwagen (1977: 300a), profess not to understand ontological pluralism at all. Others say that ontological pluralism is “obfuscation” (Quine 1948: 23), “hallucinating” (Lewis 1990: 30), “gibberish or mere noise” (Lycan 1979: 290).⁷ There is one basic idea behind all of these objections. The worry is that ontological pluralism is an idle hypothesis because it is or can be made to be necessarily equivalent to ontological monism (McDaniel 2009; 2017, ch. 1). As a result, there is no reason to prefer ontological pluralism to ontological monism. To see this, consider an ontological monist position that Suárez himself takes to be an alternative view to his own. Suárez’s monist opponents deny that there are multiple ways of being and that there are multiple senses of ‘being’. The monist therefore says that there are beings of reason in the same sense in which there are cats and hats. For the monist, the difference between beings of reason and cats is not their ways of being but their properties: beings of reason are mind-dependent, say, but cats are not.

Suárez’s language can be made necessarily equivalent to the monist’s. This point is typically made nowadays in terms of quantifiers. Suárez uses quantifiers to express ontological claims, but he more often uses ontic predicates like ‘is’. Accordingly, I will formulate the objection in terms of ontic predicates. Suárez recognizes two specific ontic predicates — ‘objectively is’ and ‘really is’ — whereas his monist opponents recognize only one, which we can write, ‘generically is’. As McDaniel (2009; 2017, ch. 1) nicely shows in another context, Suárez can accept the ontological monist’s generic ontic predicate, defining it as a disjunction of his specific ontic predicates, as follows:

x generically is =_{df} x objectively is or x really is

7. Lycan uses these words to describe Meinongian quantification.

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And now Suárez can say everything the ontological monist can say. But the monist also can accept Suárez’s specific ontic predicates, defining them in terms of the generic ontic predicate and suitable other predicates, perhaps as follows:

x objectively is =_{df} x generically is and x is mind-dependent

x really is =_{df} x generically is and x is not mind-dependent

And now the monist can say everything that Suárez can say (even if they disagree about cases). This shows that while Suárez and the monist use a different language, they say the same thing. The only difference is that Suárez takes specific ontic predicates to be more semantically primitive than the generic ontic predicate, while the monist takes the generic ontic predicate to be semantically more primitive. But this appears to be a matter of bookkeeping, not a matter of philosophical import.

Fortunately, Suárez responds to this precise worry. It is easy to miss, but Suárez is fully aware of the threat from ontological monism, and he thinks he has a decisive reason to prefer ontological pluralism to ontological monism. In Suárez’s context, the ontological monist maintains that ‘being’ is univocal between cats and goat-stags. Suárez’s argument against this claim constitutes an argument for ontological pluralism and, *a fortiori*, a response to the idle hypothesis objection. To see how the argument goes, we must first have in mind a rough sketch of Suárez’s framework for thinking about semantic analogy.

Suárez takes for granted the standard scholastic framework for thinking about language.⁸ According to this framework, the terms of an artificial language like English or Latin are associated with or “subordinated to” concepts, which function as terms in a mental language. For Suárez, a term *n* in a spoken language is univocal just in case *n* is subordinated to a single, uniform concept (DM 28.3.2, XXVI, 13b; 28.3.21, XXVI, 21a). (It is not entirely clear how Suárez conceives of

8. See Suárez, *De anima* 3.5–6, III, 630a–641a. For more sustained treatment of Suárez’s doctrine of the analogy of being as between various existents, see Ashworth (1995), Heider (2007), and Salas (2014).

a non-uniform concept, but for our purposes that will not matter.) A term *n* is equivocal just in case it is subordinated to multiple concepts by chance. For example, the Dutch word 'bank' is equivocal because it is subordinated by chance to the concept of a financial institution and to the concept of a piece of living room furniture. A spoken term *n* is analogical just in case (i) *n* is subordinated to a non-uniform concept,⁹ or (ii) *n* is subordinated to multiple concepts by design, due to an appropriate relationship between the significates of those concepts. The term 'healthy' is analogical in the second sense because it is subordinated by design to the concept a properly functioning biological state (as in a healthy cat) and to the concept of the power to bring about such a state (as in healthy food).

Now Suárez argues against the univocity of being as follows:

But a common concept [of being] has no place here, since such a concept requires that inferiors truly and intrinsically¹⁰ participate in the form signified by the name. But a being of reason cannot intrinsically participate in the being by which a being is said to be. [DM 54.1.10, XXVI, 1018a]

Here Suárez denies that there is a common concept of being that applies to cats and goat-stags alike. It follows that the natural language term 'being' (and its cognates) cannot be subordinated to a single, common concept of being. Hence, univocity is false. As a first pass, the argument appears to run as follows.

Suárez's argument against the univocity of being:

(1) If concept C is common to *x*₁, *x*₂, ... *x*_{*n*}, then C signifies a property intrinsic to *x*₁, *x*₂, ... *x*_{*n*}.

9. An example of this sort of analogy is 'exists', which somehow has enough structure built in to apply primarily to God, and then to substances, and then to accidents (DM 28.3.21, XXVI, 21a). How exactly this works remains a mystery that Suárez himself was unsure about.

10. Reading *intrinsece* with Vivès rather than *extrinsece* with the 1597 edition.

(2) Being is not intrinsic to beings of reason.

(3) Hence, there is no concept of being common to beings of reason and real beings.

(4) Hence, 'being' is not predicated univocally of beings of reason and real beings.

Understanding this argument is absolutely crucial to understanding Suárez's brand of ontological pluralism and the motivation behind it. It also turns out to be much more cogent than it at first appears to be. I will demonstrate this by a process of explanation and refinement, beginning with premise (2).

3a. *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Being*

Suárez explains the difference between existence and objective being in terms of intrinsicity and extrinsicity: existence is an intrinsic sort of being, and objective being is an extrinsic sort of being. Although it is easy to miss, this feature of the view is prominent in Suárez's initial statement of his position:

But that which is thus objectively in the mind sometimes has or can have *in itself* true real being, according to which it is an object for reason, and this absolutely and simply is not a true being of reason but real. [...] But sometimes something is an object for or considered by reason that does not have another real or positive being *in itself* besides being an object for the intellect or reason thinking about it. [...] Therefore, 'being of reason' is correctly defined as that which has being only objectively in the intellect, or that which is cognized by reason as a being, *even though it has no entity in itself*. [...] Therefore, from this explanation of the word, which is also a definition of the thing signified (insofar as a definition is possible), it can obviously be gathered that there is something that can be called by the title of a being of reason. For many things

are conceived by our intellect that have no real being *in themselves*. [My emphasis, DM 54.1.6–7, XXVI, 1016b]

Here Suárez states that beings of reason by definition have no being *in themselves*. In other words, objective being is an extrinsic sort of being. In other places Suárez tells us that objective being is an extrinsic denomination, while existence is an intrinsic denomination.¹¹

For Suárez the notion of an extrinsic denomination does the work of the contemporary notion of an extrinsic property, as opposed to an intrinsic property. Examples of intuitively intrinsic properties include being made of tin, being a human, and having negative charge. Examples of intuitively extrinsic properties include being a grandmother, being Peter's favorite coffee shop, and being thought about. Suárez's own examples of extrinsic denominations include being seen, being loved, being to the left of a column, being clothed, being located in Rome (DM 54.2.8–9, XXVI, 1020a), being married, being a buyer, and being a seller (DM 54.6.6, XXVI, 1040b).¹² So Suárez thinks that being for a goat-stag is an extrinsic property, like being to the left of a column, whereas being for a cat is an intrinsic property, like being made of tin.¹³

But how exactly are we to understand the notion of extrinsic being? Getting a grip on this concept provides significant insight into Suárez's brand of ontological pluralism and also helps to understand why he rejects the univocity of being with respect to real beings and beings of reason. As far as I know, Suárez nowhere attempts to analyze the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction, but he does provide hints, and those

hints can be illuminated by the contemporary literature on the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction.¹⁴

David Lewis once informally characterized the distinction as follows: "In general, something has an intrinsic property solely in virtue of how that thing itself is; it has a purely extrinsic property solely in virtue of how accompanying things, and its external relations to those accompanying things, are" (Lewis 2001: 384). Here Lewis characterizes the intrinsic/extrinsic distinction in terms of the *in virtue of* relation. He ultimately finds this characterization unsatisfactory because we do not have a "clear enough understanding of 'solely in virtue of'" (Lewis 2001: 384).

However, the *in virtue of* relation has been the subject of much progress in recent metaphysics. Even critics of the *in virtue of* relation agree that we have a clear enough understanding of it (Wilson 2014, Koslicki 2015). Advocates note that we often say that certain facts obtain in virtue of others. We might say, for example, that glass is fragile in virtue of its microphysical structure, an act is wrong in virtue of the fact that it causes pain, I am in pain in virtue of the fact that my C-fibers are firing, and 'Trump' refers to Trump in virtue of a baptism ceremony.¹⁵ Grounding theorists advocate taking such claims at face value, and they offer theories of the *in virtue of* relation, which is the converse of the grounding relation. There are many open questions about grounding, but for our purposes we may understand it very roughly as a relation of non-causal production between facts, such that if A grounds B,

11. Examples of these claims abound in Suárez. For a start, see DM 54.2.11–12, XXVI, 1020b–1021a; 8.1.4, XXV, 276b; 31.1.2, XXVI, 225b; 32.2.14, XXVI, 323a. The claim that objective being is extrinsic does not make a prominent appearance in many later Jesuit treatments of beings of reason, but Giuseppe Polizzi attributes it to Suárez and argues at length for it (*Philosophicarum disputationum tomus primus de logica*, d. 11, s. 5, pp. 133a–136a).

12. For more examples, see Doyle (1984).

13. I first proposed the idea of understanding extrinsic being as an extrinsic property in Embry (2017).

14. Some of Suárez's Jesuit followers offer more in the way of at least describing the difference between intrinsic and extrinsic denominations. A characterization remarkably similar to Lewis's can be found in Izquierdo, *Pharus scientiarum*, d. 12, q. 3, n. 42, p. 298a. Another interesting passage is in Carleton, *Philosophia universa*, Logica, d. 14, s. 1, p. 70a. Carleton notes that the standard example of an extrinsic denomination, *being cognized*, can be had in an intrinsic fashion, as when one thinks about oneself, but *being cognized* is an extrinsic denomination nonetheless because intrinsic denominations are necessarily intrinsic.

15. These examples are adapted from Rosen (2010). Similar examples can be found *passim* in the grounding literature.

then A gives rise to B. In that case, A also provides a *sui generis* meta-physical explanation for B, and A is ontologically prior to B.¹⁶

This is not the place to argue for a particular analysis of intrinsicity, but I want to show how the notion of grounding can provide a better sense of what it could mean to say that something has extrinsic being. Gideon Rosen (2010) develops Lewis's informal characterization into an analysis of intrinsic properties.¹⁷ Adapting Rosen's analysis slightly for present purposes, we can understand intrinsicity as follows:

The grounding analysis of intrinsicity:

F is intrinsic if and only if, as a matter of necessity, for all x:

- (i) If x is F in virtue of $\phi(y)$ — where $\phi(y)$ is a fact containing y as a constituent — then y is part of x; and
- (ii) If x is not-F in virtue of $\phi(y)$, then y is part of x.

Here the 'all' in 'for all x' has to be understood unrestrictedly, as ranging over anything with any sort of being. Any property or way of being that is not intrinsic is extrinsic. Thus, there are two ways to be extrinsic on Rosen's analysis. F is extrinsic just in case (i) a fact of the form [x is F] could be grounded in $\phi(y)$, where $\phi(y)$ is a fact containing y as a constituent, and y is not a part of x, or (ii) a fact of the form [x is not-F] could be grounded in $\phi(y)$, where y is not a part of x. (The purpose of the second clause is to account for the extrinsicity of loneliness. Something is not-lonely because there is something else, so, by the second clause, loneliness is extrinsic. For our purposes we may focus on the first clause.) Rosen's analysis yields the correct results with respect to Suárez's examples of extrinsic properties. Possibly, I am seen in virtue of a perceptual episode belonging to someone else, who is not a part of me, so *being seen* is an extrinsic property. I am to the left of this

16. The literature on grounding is vast and growing quickly. In addition to Rosen (2010), canonical discussions include Schaffer (2009) and Fine (2012).

17. The application of Rosen's analysis of extrinsicity to extrinsic being I am borrowing from Embry (2017).

column in virtue of the relative positions of myself and this column, which is not a part of me, so *being to the left of this column* is an extrinsic property. I am a seller because of a transaction between myself and a buyer, who is not a part of me, so being a seller is an extrinsic property. And so on.¹⁸ It is important to note that grounding is *not* efficient causation. Otherwise, every property that is caused by something outside its bearer would be extrinsic. I return below to the relationship between grounding and causation *vis-à-vis* beings of reason.¹⁹

Suárez thinks that objective being is like being seen, being to the left of a column, being a seller, and other extrinsic properties. Rosen's analysis of extrinsicity can help us get some grip on what it might mean to say that being is extrinsic. In light of Rosen's analysis, to say that objective being is extrinsic is to say that facts of the form [x has objective being] could be grounded in facts with constituents that are not part of x. As mentioned above, Suárez does not leave us with an explicit theory of grounding or extrinsicity. My claim here is not that Suárez explicitly endorses the above analysis of extrinsicity; my claim is that Rosen's analysis of extrinsicity helps us to get an independent grip on what it might mean to say that objective being is extrinsic, and why that claim matters.

But I can also make a slightly stronger claim: Suárez's own remarks are not only consistent with but also suggestive of the above explanation of extrinsic being. For Suárez explicitly states that objective being is grounded in some real being:

18. A potentially serious problem for Rosen's analysis is that it entails that non-existence is intrinsic, for how can something that does not exist have intrinsic properties? It is not entirely clear how Suárez would respond to this worry, but there is some evidence that he thinks that non-existents can have intrinsic properties. This is because he thinks non-existents can have the intrinsic property of being "non-repugnant" or not metaphysically impossible, even if they have extrinsic being (DM 31.2.2, XXVI, 230a; 31.3.3, XXVI, 233b; 31.6.13, XXVI, 246a). So it is possible that Suárez would bite the bullet on this objection.

19. The fact that grounding is not efficient causation does not by itself rule out the possibility of an effect being grounded in its cause, just as *being taller than* is not the same as *thinking about*, and yet I can think about something than which I am taller.

That objective being, although it is nothing in the being of reason, nevertheless necessarily presupposes some real being, in which it is grounded [*fundetur*], or from whose denomination or relation that objective being *quasi* results. [DM 54.2.3, XXVI, 1019a; see also DM 1.1.6, XXV, 4a; DM 54.1.9, XXVI 1018a]

In the surrounding passage Suárez makes it clear that the real being in which a being of reason is grounded is a token thought [*aliquam cogitationem*] (DM 54.2.4, XXVI, 1019a).²⁰ So his view is that objective being is grounded in thoughts. Suárez himself does not explicitly connect this grounding claim with his claims to the effect that objective being is extrinsic, but in light of Rosen's analysis of extrinsicality, it becomes exegetically fruitful to do so. The idea can be summed up like this:

- (i) Suárez claims that objective being is extrinsic, like being married or being to the left of a column.
- (ii) For a property or feature of something to be extrinsic is for it to be grounded in something else — something not a part of the thing extrinsically denominated.
- (iii) So, when Suárez claims that objective being is extrinsic, we can understand him as saying that objective being, or facts about objective being, are grounded in something outside of the objective beings themselves.
- (iv) In fact, this is how Suárez talks: he says that objective being is grounded in *de re* thoughts about objective beings. For example, the objective being of goat-stag is grounded in my thought about a goat-stag.

This explanation of objective being reveals the truth behind Shield's interpretation. While Suárez clearly states that there is more than one way of being, one of those ways of being — objective being — is not

20. Suárez also allows that objective being can be grounded in acts of the imagination (DM 54.2.18, XXVI, 1023b).

metaphysically fundamental. So beings of reason are metaphysically dependent on and posterior to *de re* thoughts about them.

It is natural to think that objects of thought are already “out there”, waiting for us somehow to grasp them mentally. Shields's interpretation is correct insofar as it denies this picture. On Suárez's view, beings of reason are not there until we think about them. As Suárez explains, there is a sense in which we are the efficient causes of beings of reason (DM 54.2.3, XXVI, 1019a).²¹ To be sure, beings of reason do not have efficient causes strictly speaking, since efficient causes bring things into *existence*, and beings of reason do not exist (DM 54.2.2, XXVI, 1018b). But the intellect “produces” beings of reason by producing the thoughts in which they are grounded:

The intellect is the efficient cause [loosely speaking]²² of beings of reason, but it produces them only by producing some cognition or concept, by reason of which [*ratione cuius*] the being of reason is said to have objective being in the intellect. [DM 54.2.4, XXVI, 1019a]

So the picture is this. The intellect efficiently causes a thought. That thought grounds a being of reason. So we produce beings of reason indirectly, by producing the mental acts in which they are grounded. Similarly, we might produce semantic facts by producing the baptismal ceremonies in which they are grounded, normative facts by producing the social facts in which they are grounded, and so on.²³ As will

21. Some authors reject Suárez's position on the grounds that the object of thought must be available for thought prior to our thinking about it. Suárez's defenders simply reject that idea, saying that the objects of thought are in a sense generated by our thoughts. See Carleton, *Logica, Philosophia universa*, d. 13, s. 2, n. 4, p. 66a–66b.

22. This insertion is justified by a nearby text, where Suárez says that the intellect is an efficient cause of beings of reason “in a broad sense [*lato modo*]” (my emphasis, DM 54.2.4, XXVI, 1019a).

23. In the generation after Suárez, other Jesuits argue that beings of reason can be produced in this way by the senses and simple acts of apprehension (Arriaga, *Cursus, Metaphysica*, d. 7, s. 3, ss. 2–3, pp. 1013a–1015b).

become clear below, the metaphysically derivative nature of objective being is why Suárez's brand of pluralism is non-strict.

3b. *The common concept principle*

So here is where we stand: Suárez rejects the univocity of being with respect to real beings and beings of reason because being is not intrinsic to beings of reason. This is to say that facts of the form [x has objective being] are grounded in facts containing *de re* thoughts about x.²⁴ But how does it follow that there is no common concept of being? To answer this question, return for a moment to Suárez's argument against the generic concept of being:

But a common concept [of being] has no place here, since such a concept requires that inferiors truly and intrinsically participate in the form signified by the name. But a being of reason cannot intrinsically participate in the being by which a being is said to be. [DM 54.1.10, XXVI, 1018a]

The claim that there is no common concept of being appears from this passage to be based on what I will call the common concept principle:

The common concept principle: If concept C applies to $x_1, x_2, x_3, \dots x_n$, then C signifies a property had by $x_1, \dots x_n$ in an intrinsic fashion.

Since a common concept of being would not signify an intrinsic property, Suárez concludes that we simply have no common concept of being.

Unfortunately, the common concept principle is *prima facie* implausible, since it seems to imply that we do not have concepts for extrinsic properties. The common concept principle also stands in tension with Suárez's optimism about what the human intellect is capable of conceiving, as indicated by his treatment of beings of reason, in addition

24. Alternatively, [a goat-stag has being] is grounded in a fact containing a thought about a goat-stag.

to his frequent discussion of extrinsic denominations. If we have no concepts for extrinsic properties, then we have no concept of objective being. Presumably that conclusion would not be welcome to Suárez.

A weaker, more plausible reading of the common concept principle is available, on the basis of another passage in which Suárez again affirms something close to the common concept principle:

[Some terms] signify a form that is intrinsically in the first analogate alone and in the others only by a relation or extrinsic denomination, like 'health' and other terms. The unity of the formal concept is inconsistent with this sort of case, since the analogates are not properly similar or in agreement. [DM 2.1.14, XXV, 70a]

This passage is importantly different from the previous passage. The claim in this passage is not that we do not have concepts of extrinsic properties, but that such concepts do not have "unity." We might therefore understand Suárez as saying that if we have such concepts, they must be composite, perhaps because they are built up by way of definition out of concepts for intrinsic properties and relations. On my proposed weakening, the common concept principle is about the relative semantic fundamentality of certain terms in a mental language, and it states:

The weak common concept principle: Any concept of an extrinsic property has a decomposition into more basic concepts of intrinsic properties and relations.

As far as I know, there is no smoking-gun proof text supporting the weak common concept principle. The merits of the weak principles are that (i) it is plausible and consistent with Suárez's seeming presumption that we do in fact have concepts of extrinsic properties, whereas the strong version is not so consistent, and (ii) the weak reading of the common concept principle is supported by Suárez's treatment of the analogy of extrinsic attribution, as I will now explain. This sort of

analogy occurs when 'F' signifies a property that some things have in an intrinsic fashion and others have in an extrinsic fashion. Suárez tells us that what it is to be F in an extrinsic fashion can be defined in terms of a relation to something's being F in an intrinsic fashion. Consider one of Suárez's examples: the generic predicate 'being healthy' (DM 28.3.14). We could of course distinguish between various specific ways of being healthy: being healthy for an animal, being healthy for a diet, being healthy for a relationship, and so on. But Suárez is concerned with a generic predicate, generic in the sense that it applies to animals, diets, and relationships. Suárez notes that the generic predicate 'healthy' signifies a property that some things have intrinsically and some things have extrinsically. For example, a healthy cat has health intrinsically, but healthy medicine has health extrinsically.²⁵ This is sufficient to make the generic property *being healthy* extrinsic, according to the above analysis of extrinsicality. For present purposes, the important point is that Suárez tells us that what it is for medicine to be healthy can be defined in terms of the health of an animal: for medicine to be healthy is for medicine to cause the health of an animal. So here we have an extrinsic property, the generic property of being healthy. This property is extrinsic because some things have it in virtue of their relations to other things. The weak common concept principle predicts that, if we have a generic concept of health, that concept must have a decomposition into intrinsic properties and relations. And that is exactly what Suárez says: to be healthy in the generic sense is (something like) to be in a properly functioning biological state, or to cause such a state, or... Hence, the extrinsic property of being healthy has a decomposition into the intrinsic property of being in a properly functioning biological state and causal relations to that state.

According to the weak common concept principle, our concepts of intrinsic properties and relations are semantically more fundamental

25. This point relies on a distinction between a property's being extrinsic and a property's being had in an extrinsic or intrinsic way. Roughly, health is extrinsic because, possibly, something is healthy in virtue of something else. But health can be had in an intrinsic way, in virtue of being in a properly functioning biological state.

than our concepts of extrinsic properties. On this reading, Suárez can grant that we have concepts of extrinsic properties, and, more to the point, of generic being. His point is that such concepts are semantically derivative.²⁶ And in the immediately above quotation, Suárez also provides a rationale for the weak common concept principle: "since the analogates are not properly similar or in agreement." In other words, Suárez assumes that the semantically primitive terms in our mental language are resemblance-tracking. But terms that pick out extrinsic properties are not resemblance-tracking. For example, the property of being made of tin or close to something made of tin does not track resemblance-making features of the world: it can be shared by a tin can and a pile of cat food. Suárez concludes that our concept of such a property, if we have one, is semantically derivative. The common concept of being fails to track resemblance in exactly the same way that the concept of being made of tin or close to something made of tin does (*De anima* 4.1.3–4, III, 713b–714a).²⁷ So, Suárez concludes, the common concept of being, if we have such a concept, is semantically derivative on a more specific concept of being that is resemblance tracking.²⁸

At this point someone might object or at least be puzzled about how to square (my reading of) Suárez's view of being with apparently conflicting passages throughout the *Metaphysical Disputations*. If I am right, Suárez thinks we have multiple concepts of being, and the generic concept of being is derived from the more primitive, specific concepts of being. But, someone might worry, the whole point of DM 2 is to establish that we have *only one* formal and *only one* objective concept of being. Further, on my reading, objective being is extrinsic;

26. Suárez recognizes the possibility of "aggregative" concepts in his discussion of the concept of being; one of his examples of such a concept is the disjunctive concept, *substance or accident* (DM 2.2.8–9, XXV, 72a–72b).

27. Suárez also tells us that beings of reason "do not have any similarity with real beings, by reason of which they would have a common concept with real beings" (DM 54.1.4, XXVI, 1016a).

28. Suárez states that the concept of real being is unitary precisely because it tracks a resemblance-making feature of the world (DM 2.2.14, XXV, 74b–75a).

but in DM 28.3.14–17, Suárez argues for the claim that being is analogous by the *intrinsic* analogy of attribution, which entails that being is intrinsic to the items to which the concept of being applies.

My answer to this worry is to point out that ‘being’ is systematically ambiguous in the *Metaphysical Disputations* between (at least) real being, generic being, and objective being (for simplicity I omit other ways of being, like potential being). In DM 1, Suárez argues that the object of metaphysics is real being. Hence, he is generally concerned with real being in the first 53 disputations, and claims that seem to conflict with my reading can be read as being about real being, not a generic concept of being that applies to real beings and beings of reason. Consider the examples cited above from DM 2 and DM 28. Suárez opens DM 2 by telling us he is concerned with the *ratio* of the object of metaphysics, which is real being. So his claim that we have only one concept of being means that we have only one concept of real being. And in DM 28.3, where Suárez says that being is analogous with the intrinsic analogy of attribution, Suárez is speaking of the division of real being into God and creatures (DM 28.3.10). Beings of reason are neither real, nor God, nor creatures; so his claims there are not about beings of reason.

We may now return to Suárez’s argument against the univocity of being. In light of the foregoing, the argument appears to run as follows:

Suárez’s argument against the univocity of being:

- (1) Any concept of an extrinsic property has a decomposition into more basic concepts of intrinsic properties and relations.
- (2) Generic being is extrinsic.
- (3) Hence, there is no semantically primitive concept of generic being common to existents and beings of reason.

Suárez on Beings of Reason and Non-Strict Ontological Pluralism

- (4) Hence, there is no univocal, semantically primitive concept of being common to existents and beings of reason.

Premise (1) is based on the assumptions that (i) the primitives in a mental language track resemblance-making features of the world, and (ii) extrinsic properties are not resemblance-making features of the world. Even if the first assumption turns out to be mistaken, the argument might be re-stated in terms of an ideal language whose primitives track the “perfectly natural” properties in Lewis’s (1983) sense, extrinsic properties being less than perfectly natural. Premise (2) is based on Suárez’s claim that the being of beings of reason is grounded in *de re* thoughts and is therefore extrinsic. Given a grounding analysis of extrinsicality, Suárez’s claim that objective being is grounded in *de re* thoughts entails that objective being is extrinsic.

To be clear about the dialectical situation, Suárez does not offer any arguments, as far as I am aware, for the claim that objective being is grounded in *de re* thoughts. But it does not follow that nothing can be said in favor of that claim. In my view, it is intuitively plausible that goat-stags and their ilk have being only because someone thinks about them. The ‘only because’ here is plausibly cashed out in terms of grounding. Further support for the claim that objective being is grounded in *de re* thoughts might come from the attractiveness of the resulting theory. As we have seen, there is some motivation to assert that (i) there are beings of reason, since we can think about them and say true things about them, but, obviously (ii) beings of reason do not exist. Suárez wants to endorse both claims, thereby securing the benefits of both. Ontological pluralism allows one to endorse both claims. But as the Idle Hypothesis shows, it is not enough merely to endorse ontological pluralism. One must motivate ontological pluralism, and show that it is not “mere obfuscation”. Suárez’s claim that objective being is grounded in *de re* thoughts is the linchpin of his response to the Idle Hypothesis objection. If you grant that claim, you get an attractive theory of nonexistent objects of thought.

If ontological monism is construed as the claim that the generic ontic predicate is semantically primitive, while the specific ontic predicates are derivative, Suárez's argument against univocity constitutes an argument against ontological monism and, *a fortiori*, a response to the Idle Hypothesis objection. In the end, Suárez's claim is that 'generic being' is not resemblance tracking, just as 'being tin or close to something tin' is not resemblance tracking. The reason for this is that generic being is extrinsic, just as *being tin or close to something tin* is extrinsic, and extrinsic properties are not resemblance-tracking. Suárez thinks mental language is ideal insofar as its primitive terms are resemblance-tracking. It follows that mental language does not have a primitive concept of being that applies univocally to cats and goat-stags. Given that there are goat-stags, monism is false.

However, it is worth noting that Suárez recognizes only one intrinsic way of being: existence. It follows from the foregoing that Suárez can recognize only one ontic predicate as semantically primitive: 'exists'. 'Objective being' cannot be primitive because it is an extrinsic denomination and therefore fails to be resemblance-tracking, just like 'being seen' fails to be resemblance-tracking. So while Suárez recognizes multiple ontic predicates, he can recognize only one primitive ontic predicate: 'exists'. If ontological pluralism is construed as the claim that multiple, specific ontic predicates are primitive, it would follow that Suárez is not an ontological pluralist. This reveals why there is something right about Shields's interpretation, insofar as it rejects an ontological pluralist interpretation.

But the claim that Suárez is an ontological monist obscures an interesting distinction between dialectical options that Suárez's discussion brings to the fore. Given Suárez's two specific ontic predicates and the generic ontic predicate, one might think:

- i. Only the generic ontic predicate is primitive,
- ii. All and only the specific ontic predicates are primitive,
- iii. Only one specific ontic predicate is primitive, or

- iv. No ontic predicates are primitive.

I have characterized ontological monism as (i) (as does McDaniel 2009; 2017, ch. 1). Clearly, (ii) would be a kind of ontological pluralism (McDaniel 2009; 2017, ch. 1). But Suárez's view is best characterized by (iii), a kind of half-way house between (i) and (ii). It is important to make these distinctions, since an argument for one of the above options might not support, and might even undermine, the others. Suárez rejects (i) because generic being is extrinsic, and he rejects (ii) because objective being is extrinsic. He endorses (iii) because he thinks that existence is primitive, but objective being is not. Now that we understand the structure of and motivation behind Suárez's view, it would perhaps be idle to haggle over labels. But in my view it is best to characterize Suárez's view as a kind of ontological pluralism according to which there is more than one way of being, but only one such way is fundamental. I propose the label 'non-strict ontological pluralism'. If someone wants to insist that Suárez's view is better characterized as non-strict ontological monism, I will not object, but the important point is that there is a philosophical difference between (i) and (iii), and Suárez thinks (iii) has something to recommend it, while (i) does not.²⁹

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29. This paper was improved in light of valuable feedback from *Philosophers' Imprint's* referees, Martin Pickavé, Marleen Rozemond, audiences at the University of Groningen, and the University of Notre Dame's "Being Univocal" conference at the London campus.

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